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AUTHOR Plato, Kathleen C.; Rasp, Alfred, Jr.
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ABSTRACT

Most teenagers learn to drive through a combination of classroom instruction, simulated driving experiences, and road driving. As part of a larger study focusing on public opinions of traffic safety education, parental views on safety education effectiveness, the licensing of teenage drivers, and parental involvement in driver education in the state of Washington were solicited in a statewide survey. Parents of recently licensed teenage drivers (553 mothers, 255 fathers, and 24 guardians), with an average of 25 years of driving experience, completed a 22 question, one page survey. An analysis of the results showed that parents supported the requirement of a traffic safety education (TSE) course prior to licensing but did not feel a second, advanced course was necessary. Further, they believed that TSE was instrumental in helping teenagers to learn highway rules and regulations and to operate a motor vehicle in a safe manner. Parents supported the idea of a probationary license for 16- and 17-year-olds which could be taken away for citations for poor performance. They did not support a restrictive license which would not allow 16- and 17-year-olds to drive between midnight and 6 a.m. Parents also did not believe students should be required to wait until age 16 to enroll in TSE courses. The majority of parents reported helping their teenager learn to drive, spending an average of 38 hours in the effort. Parents reported they were willing to pay part of the TSE course fee, and they felt a fee in the $31 to $45 range was appropriate. (BL)

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Superintendent of Public Instruction

DR. FRANK B. BROUILLET
Superintendent

MONA H. BAILEY
Assistant Superintendent
Division of Instructional
Programs and Services

JEAN WIEMAN
Director
Programs, Resources
and Technology

TRAFFIC SAFETY EDUCATION STAFF

Dr. Gary Bloomfield, Program Manager
William Hiblar, Supervisor
Beverly Linville, ESD 121 Regional Coordinator
Clyde McBrayer, ESD 113 Regional Coordinator
Joseph Mertens, ESD 101 Regional Coordinator
Art Opfer, ESD 105 Regional Coordinator

PARENTAL VIEWS ON ISSUES RELATED TO TRAFFIC SAFETY EDUCATION AND THE LICENSING OF TEENAGE DRIVERS

Results of a Statewide Survey of Washington Parents

TRAFFIC SAFETY EDUCATION
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
1983

Prepared by:

Kathleen C. Plato, Supervisor
Testing and Evaluation

Alfred Rasp, Jr., Director
Testing and Evaluation

Prepared for:

Gary Bloomfield, Program Manager
Traffic Safety Education

Jean Wieman, Director
Programs, Resources and Technology Section

Mona H. Bailey, Assistant Superintendent
Division of Instructional Programs and Services

February, 1983

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Background

Most teenagers learn to drive through a combination of classroom instruction, simulated driving experiences, and road driving. While numerous studies focus on school driver education programs, few studies examine out-of-school driving experiences or family variables such as amount of parental assistance. Fewer still review factors that account for putting a new teenage driver on the road. Issues such as affordability of fees, parental views on licensing, and the reasons for driving prior to age 18 are not often examined.

During the 1981 and 1982 sessions of the Washington State Legislature, much attention was focused on driver education and licensing. With the expectation that the same issues and related legislation would come up again in 1983, the Traffic Safety Education (TSE) unit in the Office of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI) conducted a systematic collection of public opinions on school TSE programs. The focus was licensing issues and teenage driving; the method was a statewide survey of the parents of newly licensed teenage drivers.

The survey of parental opinion was one part of a larger data collection effort. To meet external and internal requests for information, the TSE unit requested the assistance of the Testing and Evaluation section of the same agency in developing a coordinated evaluation and management information plan. Three major types of projects were defined, (1) development of a computerized data base, (2) reanalysis of available TSE data, and (3) collection of data related to TSE effectiveness.

The TSE survey of parents was among the projects in the third area. The survey was planned and completed between January, 1982 and January, 1983. This report describes the preliminary findings from the parent survey.

The Survey

The survey was designed to address three broad questions:

1. How do parents of recently licensed teenage drivers feel about traffic safety education effectiveness?
2. To what extent are parents involved in the learning to drive process?
3. How do parents feel about specific issues such as course requirements, fee structures, and restrictive licenses?

Within these parameters, a 22 question, one-page survey was designed by the state agency's Testing and Evaluation section and the Traffic Safety Education unit with advice from the Department of Licensing (DOL).

Procedures

Two objectives were kept in mind as procedures were developed. An effort was made to select a statewide sample of parents representing both public school and commercially trained students. Second, in keeping with the state's effort to reduce paperwork, and not burden school district personnel with the data collection, a process was selected that used a system other than the public schools.

The task required interagency cooperation with the DOL licensing stations. The key link was the course completion form -- a certificate issued by the state education agency through public, private, or commercial schools. The certificate verifies that a TSE course has been satisfactorily completed and is surrendered to the DOL licensing station when a driver's license is issued. The certificate has a unique number, identifies the school from which the course was taken and

provides licensing date, course completion date, and home address. It proved to be the perfect vehicle for selection of the sample of parents who would receive the survey.

Certificates were collected at the 57 DOL licensing stations during the most active months for new licensing -- April, May, and June. A total of 10,760 useable certificates were collected and supplied to the state office. A 10 percent (1,076) random sample was drawn during the summer of 1982. Parents of these recently licensed teenagers were mailed a survey with a cover letter from the State Superintendent of Public Instruction explaining the purpose of this special survey.

The initial mailing was followed by a reminder postcard to nonrespondents. At the cutoff date a total of 836 responses had been received. Four of the responses could not be used due to alteration of the data processing number. The total useable response rate was 77 percent.

The Respondents

The 832 valid surveys were completed by 553 mothers, 255 fathers, and 24 guardians. Seventy-seven percent of the respondents were from western Washington counties; 23 percent lived east of the Cascade Mountains. Virtually all respondents (99%) were drivers. The average number of years of driving per respondent was 25 years. Almost all of the respondents (99%) reported driving a motor vehicle at least once per week. The majority of respondents (67%) had not taken a traffic safety education course.

To identify variables that may have prompted variations in responses, parents were asked additional questions about their recently licensed teenager. The majority of parents (60%) reported that their child was licensed to drive within

two months of completing a TSE course, 21 percent had waited from three to five months, and 14 percent had waited six months to a year. Five percent had waited a full year before licensing.

The large marjority of teenagers (86%) were licensed on their first road test attempt. Thirteen percent required two attempts and one percent required three or more attempts.

The parents of 55 teenagers (7%) reported that their children had been in a motor vehicle accident since licensing, however, the majority, 93 percent or 777 students, were accident free. Even fewer teenagers (6%) had received a traffic citation for a violation other than parking tickets since licensing. Ninety-four percent of the teenagers had not been cited.

The survey allowed this sample of parents an opportunity to comment on six issues related to teenagers and driving. The results are summarized below.

WHY DRIVE BEFORE AGE 18?

There are many factors that affect a teenager's decision to obtain a license before age 18. In an attempt to categorize these factors, parents were asked to indicate all of the reasons that prompted this decision in their family. Seven standardized responses were provided. Leading the list was "transportation to social and school events." Sixty percent of the respondents indicated this as a reason for early licensing. Forty-seven percent "saw no reason to wait." Transportation to a job was the third ranked factor with 46 percent of the parents responding. Almost forty percent of the parents indicated that they "did not want to chauffeur." A little over a third felt that the teenager's desire for independence was a factor. Family transportation was cited as a reason for 29 percent of the respondents. Only 12 percent of the parents felt that peer pressure was a factor in licensing prior to age 18.

Parents also were asked to write in any other reasons that prompted licensing before age 18. The factors cited by parents included military service, teenager was a parent, "part of growing up," reward for good grades, church activities, community college attendance at night, athletic practice and activities, living in rural area, injured or ill parents, car pool to school, no public transportation available, and driving to a private or parochial high school. At least one parent added that once a driving age has been established in a family, it is difficult to change the standards for younger siblings.

HOW MUCH TIME DO PARENTS SPEND HELPING THEIR TEENAGER LEARN TO DRIVE?

Approximately 89 percent of the respondents indicated that either one or both of the parents helped their teenager learn to drive. In some cases, however, the person responding to the survey was not the parent who provided assistance. This was the case for the 5 percent who indicated zero hours of help. Of the 790 parents who reported some time, the most frequently cited amount was 20 hours. By range, 24 percent of the parents indicated 1-10 hours of assistance; 22 percent listed 11-20 hours. Eleven percent said they helped 21-30 hours. The 31-40 hour range was the time range listed by six percent of the respondents. Twenty percent of the parents indicated they helped 41 or more hours. The range of hours for all respondents was from a low of one hour to a high of over 900 hours. The average amount of time spent by all parent respondents was 38 hours.

WHAT COURSE STANDARDS SHOULD BE REQUIRED BEFORE LICENSING?

In 1967 the Washington State Legislature raised the minimum driving age to 18 but stipulated that persons between the ages of 16 and 18 years of age may also be licensed upon the successful completion of an approved TSE course. (Chapter 167, Laws of 1967). The parents surveyed strongly agreed with this requirement. When asked whether a TSE course should continue to be required, 77

ercent *strongly agreed* with the continuation of the requirement and another 19 percent *agreed*.

Parents also felt strongly on the issue of requiring a TSE course for all new drivers with 30 percent *agreeing* and 45 percent *strongly agreeing* that a course should be taken by everyone. However, 69 percent of the respondents did not feel that a second advanced TSE course should be required.

A majority of parents were in agreement with the current standard of 15½ years as the minimum age for taking driver education. Sixty-one percent did not want the age minimum raised to 16½ years. Only a third of the respondents (34%) *agreed* that the age requirement needed to be raised.

DO PARENTS FEEL TRAFFIC SAFETY EDUCATION COURSES ARE EFFECTIVE?

Parent respondents were overwhelmingly in agreement with statements relating TSE courses to improved driver performance. When asked if their teenagers knew highway rules and regulations as a result of a TSE course, 39 percent *strongly agreed* and 58 percent *agreed*, only 3 percent *disagreed*.

The respondents also felt strongly about the relationship of TSE and the safe operation of a vehicle. Ninety-two percent of the parents *agreed* that their teenagers knew how to operate a motor vehicle safely as a result of a TSE course. Only 8 percent *disagreed* or had no opinion on this question.

SHOULD PROBATIONARY OR RESTRICTED LICENSES BE REQUIRED?

Parents were generally in favor of a probationary driver's license for 16 and 17 year olds. When asked how they felt about a probationary license that could be taken away for poor road performance or violations, 37 percent of the respondents *strongly agreed* with this idea, and another 33 percent *agreed*, twenty-five percent *disagreed*, and 5 percent had no opinion.

However, less than one-third of the respondents (31%) felt that persons under age 18 should receive a restricted license which would not allow them to drive between the hours of midnight and 6 a.m. Nearly two-thirds (64%) of the parents opposed the 12 a.m. to 6 a.m. restriction.

SHOULD THE TRAFFIC SAFETY EDUCATION FEE STRUCTURE BE ALTERED?

In 1981 a financial profile of TSE costs revealed that the state reimbursement was $122 per student. Washington State school districts are not required to charge an additional fee for the TSE program, however, most districts (90%) do charge. The same profile showed that in Washington State the fee charged to students ranged from zero to $80 with an average student fee of $22.

The survey participants were asked to report the fee their teenager was assessed for the public high school TSE course. Seven hundred thirty-eight parents responded within a fee range and an additional 34 persons reported that no fee was charged. Fourteen respondents did not know the amount of the fee. The parents reporting a fee also were asked whether they felt the fee was too high, just right, or too low. The reported fees cross-tabulated with the respondents feeling about the appropriateness of those fees is presented in Table 1.

Regardless of the fee paid, 67 percent of the respondents felt the fee was an appropriate one. Thirty-one percent felt the fee they paid was too high, two percent felt the fee was too low. Over half of the respondents (58%) paid a fee which ranged from $31 to $60.

The cross-tabulation of fee and feeling of appropriateness of fee showed that the highest response for a favorable fee range was $31 to $45; 20 percent fell into this category. This was closely followed by the $16 to $30 category and the $46 to $60 category. The boxed-in area on Table 1, representing the fee range of $16 to $60 accounted for 54 percent of the total response on this question.

Table 1

Reported TSE Course Fee and Parent View of Appropriateness

Reported Fee	Too High	Just Right	Too Low	Total Number & Percentage
1.00 - 15.00	4 (1%)	51 (7%)	5 (1%)	60 (9%)
16.00 - 30.00	24 (3%)	133 (18%)	3 (<1%)	160 (21%)
31.00 - 45.00	60 (8%)	152 (20%)	3 (<1%)	215 (29%)
46.00 - 60.00	93 (13%)	123 (16%)	0 (0%)	216 (29%)
61.00 - 75.00	36 (5%)	28 (4%)	1 (<1%)	65 (9%)
76.00 or more	11 (1%)	4 (1%)	0 (0%)	15 (2%)
No fee	0 (0%)	2 (<1%)	0 (0%)	2 (< 1%)
Don't know	0 (0%)	5 (1%)	0 (0%)	5 (1%)
Total number*	228	498	12	738
& Percentage**	31%	67%	2%	100%

* Actual number of responses
**Percentage of total responses

On another question, parents were asked if the student fees were justified for TSE courses, 17 percent of the respondents *strongly agreed*, an additional 51 percent *agreed* and 24 percent felt student fees were not an appropriate means to finance TSE courses. Eight percent had no opinion on this issue. Of those parents who felt the fee was too high, over half (56%) still agreed that some fees were appropriate.

SUMMARY

Washington State parents of recently licensed teenage drivers --

* Support the current requirement that requires a TSE course prior to licensing.
* Do not feel that a second advanced course is necessary.
* Believe that TSE has been instrumental in helping their teenagers know highway rules and regulations.
* Believe that TSE has been instrumental in helping their teenagers operate a motor vehicle in a safe manner.
* Support the idea of a probationary license for 16 and 17 year olds that could be taken away for citations for poor performance.
* Do not support a restrictive license which would not allow 16 and 17 year olds to drive between midnight and 6 a.m.
* Do not believe students should be required to wait to age 16½ before being allowed to take a TSE course.
* Helped their teenager learn to drive, spending an average of 38 hours in the effort.
* Are willing to pay part of the cost of a TSE course with a student fee.
* Feel the most appropriate fee falls in the $31 - $45 range.

For more information about the Traffic Safety Education Parent Survey contact:

Dr. Gary Bloomfield
Traffic Safety Education Program
Superintendent of Public Instruction
Old Capitol Building FG-11
Olympia, Washington 98504